AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

LISTING OF CLAIMS:

1. (Currently Amended): A method for presorting a plurality of rules for filtering a packet in network, the method comprising the steps of:

   (a)   selecting a characteristic for sorting the plurality of rules;

   (b)   associating each rule with at least one of a plurality of values for said characteristic;

   (c)   receiving the packet;

   (d)   analyzing information in the packet to ~~obtain~~retrieve from the received packet one of said values;

   (e)   selecting at least one of the plurality of rules according to said one value ~~obtained~~retrieved ~~by analyzing information in~~from the received packet ~~to obtain a selected rule,~~ wherein the selected rule is associated with said one value; and

   (f)   applying said selected rule to the received packet, such that the received packet is permitted to enter the network or alternatively is dropped in accordance with the selected rule.

2. (Previously Presented): The method of claim 1, wherein the plurality of rules are presorted according to each value for said characteristic.

3. (Previously Presented): The method of claim 1, wherein said characteristic is at least one of a source address of the packet and a destination address of the packet.

4. (Previously Presented): The method of claim 3, wherein said characteristic is a combination of said source address of the packet and said destination address of the packet.

5. (Previously Presented): The method of claim 3, wherein a user is associated with each value such that step (b) further comprises the steps of:

    (i)   assigning at least one privilege to said user; and

    (ii)   determining whether to associate each rule with said value according to said at least one privilege.

6. (Previously Presented): The method of claim 5, wherein said assigning at least one privilege to said user further comprises determining a user profile of associated rules according to said at least one privilege.

7. (Original): The method of claim 6, wherein said user profile is further associated with a group profile, such that a plurality of values for said characteristic is associated with said associated rules of said group profile.

8. (Currently Amended): An apparatus for presorting a plurality of rules for filtering a packet in network, wherein a characteristic for sorting the plurality of rules is selected, said characteristic has a plurality of possible values, and each rule is associated with at least one value for said characteristic, the apparatus comprising:

    a software module for performing the operations of:

3

analyzing information in a packet to retrieveobtain from the packet a value for said

characteristic;

selecting at least one of the plurality of rules according to said value obtainedretrieved by

analyzing information infrom the packet to obtain a selected rule, wherein the selected rule is

associated with said value; and

applying said selected rule to the packet, such that the packet is permitted to enter the

network or alternatively is dropped in accordance with the selected rule.

9.   (Previously Presented): The apparatus of claim 8, wherein the plurality of rules are presorted

according to each value for said characteristic.

10. (Previously Presented): The apparatus of claim 8, wherein said characteristic is at least one

of a source address of the packet and a destination address of the packet.

11. (Previously Presented): The apparatus of claim 10, wherein said characteristic is a

combination of said source address of the packet and said destination address of the packet.

12. (Previously Presented): The apparatus of claim 10, wherein a user is associated with each

value of said characteristic, such that software module further performs the operations of:

(i)   assigning at least one privilege to said user; and

(ii)   determining whether to associate each rule with said value according to said at

least one privilege.

4

13. (Previously Presented): The apparatus of claim 12, wherein said software module further performs the operations of: determining a user profile of associated rules according to said at least one privilege.

14. (Previously Presented): The apparatus of claim 13, wherein said user profile is further associated with a group profile, such that a plurality of values for said characteristic is associated with said associated rules of said group profile.

15. (Currently Amended): A computer program product comprising:

a computer usable medium having computer readable code embodied therein for presorting a plurality of rules for filtering a packet in network, the computer program product comprising computer readable program code for performing the operations of:

(a)   selecting a characteristic for sorting the plurality of rules, said characteristic having a plurality of possible values;

(b)   associating each rule with at least one value for said characteristic;

(c)   analyzing information in a received packet to retrieve~~obtain~~ said value from a received packet;

(d)   selecting at least one of the plurality of rules according to said value ~~obtained~~retrieved ~~by analyzing information in~~from the received packet, wherein the selected rule is associated with said value ~~to form at least one selected rule~~; and

(e)   applying said selected rule to the received packet, such that the received packet is permitted to enter the network or alternatively is dropped in accordance with said selected rule.

5

16. (Previously Presented): The computer readable program product of claim 15, wherein the plurality of rules are presorted according each value for said characteristic.

17. (Previously Presented): The computer readable program product of claim 15, wherein said characteristic is a source address of the packet.

18. (Previously Presented): The computer readable program product of claim 15, wherein said characteristic is a destination address of the packet.

19. (Previously Presented): The computer readable program product of claim 15, wherein said characteristic is a combination of a source address of the packet and a destination address of the packet.

20. (Previously Presented): The computer readable program product of claim 15, wherein a user is associated with each value of said characteristic, such that said computer readable program code further comprising the operations of:

    (i)   assigning at least one privilege to said user; and

    (ii)   determining whether to associate each rule with said value of said characteristic according to said at least one privilege.